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Believers raped, executed in North Korean jails

Torture, sexual violence, forced abortions are common tools to terrorize believers of both Christianity and Shamanism. Those who resist are shot.

by Daniela Bovolenta



Supreme Leader of North Korea Kim Jong-un (credits).

Bitter Winter Int'l (09.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2LrtsQX> - "First, a victim is read their death sentence. Second, the victim's head, ankles, and torso are roped to a wooden post. Third, the victim is executed by a five-person Border Security Command (BSC) firing squad who aim for the victim's head, chest, and feet. Fourth, a ditch is dug in front of the wooden post holding the corpse to receive the victim when the ropes are cut. Fifth, a BSC Commander will order the ditch to be filled with rocks." This happens at the border between North Korea and China, when someone is caught importing Bibles or other

religious literature into Kim Jong-un's Socialist "paradise." In one case, a BSC officer accused of complicity with Bible smuggling was executed himself.

This is one of many incidents documented in the report on religious freedom violation in North Korea, *Persecuting Faith*, published by Korea Future Initiative a few weeks ago, which prompted British Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, to call this month for Magnitsky-style sanctions against the North Korean officers responsible for such atrocities.

Also, this month, the annual White Paper on Religious Freedom in North Korea from The Database Center for North Korean Human Rights was published, which confirmed that the country remains an extreme example of religious persecution.

One interesting detail mentioned in these documents is the close cooperation between North Korea and China for persecuting believers. Devotees of both Christianity and Shamanism who try to escape to China are sent back to North Korea with a "black stamp" on their documents indicating they attended religious gatherings in China. Even North Koreans who went to China for non-religious reasons, and attended government-authorized religious activities there, discovered upon their return home that such attendance had been reported from the Chinese to the North Korean State Security, and was ground for arrest.

Persecuting Faith investigated allegations that sexual violence and forced abortions against female believers are common in North Korean jails, and found them believable. The report documented 32 such incidents.

"In one case at North Hamgyong Provincial MSS [Ministry of State Security] pre-trial detention centre, a respondent recounted a particularly appalling system of abuse," the document reports. "When a prisoner was forced into an induced abortion and gave birth to a live-born infant, MSS officers would tear a thin plastic bag and cover the infant's face with the torn plastic. The infant would then be wrapped tightly in a cloth blanket. After a short while, the infant would suffocate and die, which was noted by officers from the changing color in the infant's face. Bodies of dead infants were stored in a closet that was used for chlorine and maintenance tools. Later, the bodies of the infants were buried. Mothers of the aborted infants were forced to resume manual labor the day after the abortion and without medicine or rest."

In another case, a woman was forced to undergo an abortion "following a ruling that pregnant women could not be tried at court." She had been sent back to North Korea from China, and was detained after being suspected of attending a church. Three named MPS officers escorted the respondent to Kyongwon County Hospital. The respondent was handcuffed and injected by a named doctor. The respondent underwent an induced abortion the following day after 21-weeks of pregnancy. The infant's head was injected, and the body placed into a plastic bag. Later, an MPS officer buried the body." No longer pregnant, the woman could now be taken to court. In fact, she was "immediately removed from the hospital and was placed on trial three-days later."

Female believers are often victims of rape and other forms of sexual abuse. In one case, according to the report, even a three-year-old girl, detained with her believers' family, had her vagina and anus "examined."

Executions of believers are public, and designed to terrorize the population. In one case from 2018, three women convicted of practicing shamanism were executed by firing squad at Hyesan City airfield. At the same location, Christians are also executed, including one whose only crime was possessing a Bible.

And in the Chongori long-term re-education camp, a prisoner did not have a Bible but confessed to having read one. The victim was forced to write a confession and was executed, while the other prisoners were forced to watch.

When democratic countries negotiate with North Korea, they cannot ignore such horrific human rights abuse vested on religious believers. Nor should China's active cooperation with this horror be forgotten.

Most religious freedom violations in North Korea are against Christians

A report of the Korea Future Initiative (KFI) presents well-documented violations in North Korea. Investigators conducted 117 interviews with survivors, witnesses, and perpetrators.



Pyongyang, North Korea. / Micha Brändli, Unsplash CC0.

Evangelical Focus (09.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3qB1q9H> - **Korea Future Initiative (KFI)**, a non-profit charitable organisation, has recently **released** the first phase of **the report *Persecuting Faith: Documenting religious freedom violations in North Korea***, which analyses “the status of religion and belief in North Korea, including its manifestation in theistic, non-theistic, and atheistic forms”.

It aims “to provide an accurate accounting of patterns of documented human rights violations associated with religion and belief, that could support deterrence and accountability, to **inform decision-making in the international community**”.

Investigators conducted **117 interviews with survivors, witnesses, and perpetrators**. “In total, **273 victims** of religious freedom violations were documented. **215** of them had **adhered to Christianity**”.

“Their ages ranged from 3 to over 80-years old. **Women and girls accounted for nearly 60%** of documented victims. We also identified 54 individual perpetrators of these religious freedom violations”, the KFI said.

“Violations that disable our humanity”

A testimony quoted in the report says: “Living in North Korea meant that I could never experience religious freedom. We, instead, experience two systems of violations that disable our humanity. First, **physical human rights violations** which strip us of agency over our own bodies. Second, **mental human rights violations**”.

“Religious freedom is **a benchmark for all other freedoms in North Korea**. Without religious freedom, there can be no other rights that allow us, the people of North Korea, to reclaim our humanity”, the report says.

“Religious adherence of the victims is fundamental to charge them”

The documented criminal charges of victims included “religious practice(149) ;religious activities in China (110); possessing religious items (78); contact with religious persons (77); attending places of worship (72); and sharing religious beliefs (22).

The main human rights violations are “**arbitrary surveillance**, arrest, detention, imprisonment, and or interrogation; refoulement; punishment of family members; **torture or physical assault; sexual violence and forced abortions**; execution; **public trials** or resident exposure meetings; verbal abuse; and forced labour”.

“Charges of victims for religious issues often intersected with other criminal charges, such as **illegal border crossing**. Besides, in many cases, a single victim experienced multiple violations”, the report explains.

According to KFI, “in each documented case, the **religious adherence or association of the victim was fundamental**. A significant number of victims experienced similar forms of extreme violence”.

Reported by family and friends

“Several respondents experienced or witnessed arrests of persons who were reported to North Korean authorities for religious practice by their friends, family members, associates, neighbours, or community”, the report points out.

Most of the arrests “took place in a host of settings, such as at the homes of victims, and were characterised by **a veil of secrecy and an absence of an explanation** as to the reasons for the arrests”.

Furthermore, “respondents spoke of being **repeatedly warned in lectures and people’s unit meetings to not read Bibles** and to report anyone who owned one”.

Persecuting Faith: Documenting religious freedom violations in North Korea

Volume I

KFI conducted 117 interviews with survivors, witnesses, and perpetrators./ KFI

Testimonies of violence and abuse

The report presents several testimonies of abuse and violence towards Christians, both men and women.

A man, for instance, “was **placed inside a cage** at a pre-trial detention centre. There were **steel bars on all four-sides that were heated with electricity**. I sat there for 12-hours, until I passed out, and I kept praying to God to save me”.

Some **women were forced to have abortions** in which babies born alive were suffocated to death. “Mothers were then forced to resume manual labour the day after the abortion and without medicine or rest”, the report says.

Anti-religious education

Investigators also detailed “how respondents had been **actively educated in anti-religious education from the age of four**. While Buddhism and Cheondogyo were explained as matters of historical interest, rather than as religions, Christianity was singled out for attention within the public-school system”.

“Multiple respondents spoke of **textbooks containing sections on Christian missionaries that listed their evil deeds**, which included rape, blood-sucking, organ harvesting, murder, and espionage”, they add.

UK: “Defending the right to freedom of religion or belief for all is a priority”

KFI believes that "factual findings contained in this report will undoubtedly be of concern to the international community", because they "pose a danger not just to North Korea, but to the common principle that every human is born free and equal in dignity and rights".

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, United Kingdom Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and former Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, informed that **two** entities involved in administering the North Korean penal system were facing **sanctions** under the UK's new Global Human Rights sanctions regime.

He also stressed that "**defending the right to freedom of religion or belief for all is a priority** for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

"The KFI new report contains disturbing accounts of violations of freedoms in North Korea, and we regard it as a valuable contribution towards ensuring that human rights violations in North Korea are documented for accountability and deterrence purposes", he concluded.

An exceptional report of Korea Future Initiative about religious persecution

UK Government raises 'strong concerns' about North Korea after report into horrific persecution

Christian Today (03.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/33R7Jbt> - The Government has voiced "strong concerns" about religious persecution in North Korea after the release of a report documenting the horrific abuse of Christians and other people of faith in the hermit communist country.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon said reports from religious and human rights groups outside the country point to "severe punishment" for people of faith, including arrests, beatings and imprisonment in political camps.

"The UK continues to have strong concerns about the lack of freedom of religion or belief in North Korea," Lord Ahmad said in a letter to Lord Alton.

He added that the evidence presented by a new report from the Korea Future Initiative (KFI) contains "disturbing accounts" of religious freedom violations in North Korea.

The [report](#) is based on 117 interviews with survivors, witnesses, and perpetrators of religious persecution between 1990 and 2019.

In total, 273 victims of religious freedom violations were identified by investigators, 215 of whom were Christians.

Women and girls accounted for nearly 60 per cent of documented victims. One victim was just three years old.

The report documented criminal charges for practising a religion, taking part in religious activities in China - where many North Koreans try to defect to - possessing religious items like a Bible, having contact with religious people, attending places of worship, and sharing religious beliefs.

The victims faced arbitrary arrest, detention, interrogation, imprisonment, torture, sexual abuse, public trials and execution.

KFI said that 76 of the victims are still believed to be in the North Korean penal system.

"In each documented case, the religious adherence or association of the victim was not deemed incidental to the documented violations. It was considered by investigators to be fundamental," the report reads.

"Factual findings contained in this report will undoubtedly be of concern to the international community.

"The right to religious freedom is inalienable, universal, and fundamental. It is a human right to which all North Koreans are inherently entitled.

"Threats to this freedom pose a danger not just to North Korean citizens, but to the common principle that every human is born free and equal in dignity and rights."

The report details horrifying abuse. In one instance, a Christian was held in a 4ft by 3ft cage heated with electricity for 12 hours until he passed out. Even when unconscious, he was then beaten.

Elsewhere, the report documented forced abortions in which babies born alive were then suffocated to death. The women were then made to return to manual labour the day after the abortion without adequate rest or medicine.

In a foreword to the report, Il-lyong Ju, an exiled human rights advocate, called on the international community to help bring the perpetrators to justice.

"Religious freedom is a fundamental freedom for all humanity. Living in North Korea meant that I could never experience this freedom," said Ju.

"We, the people of North Korea, instead experience two systems of violations that disable our humanity.

"First, we experience physical human rights violations. These strip us of agency over our own bodies. Second, we experience mental human rights violations. These force us to relinquish our inner-thoughts and beliefs.

"Those of us who do not yield to our persecutors must face the consequences, including the suffering of three-generations of our families.

"For this reason alone, religious freedom is a benchmark for all other freedoms in North Korea. Without religious freedom, there can be no other rights that allow us, the people of North Korea, to reclaim our humanity."

Responding to the report, Lord Ahmad said that two entities involved in administering the North Korean penal system were facing sanctions under the UK's new Global Human Rights sanctions regime - established in response to the Bishop of Truro's independent review into Christian persecution last year.

"Defending the right to freedom of religion or belief for all is a priority for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office," said Lord Ahmad.

"The Korea Future Initiative's (KFI) new report contains disturbing accounts of violations of freedoms in North Korea, and we regard it as a valuable contribution towards ensuring that human rights violations in North Korea are documented for accountability and deterrence purposes.

"My officials would welcome the opportunity to discuss KFI's report with them in greater detail."

Number of North Koreans exposed to Bible increasing annually

By [Leah MarieAnn Klett](#)

Christian Post Reporter (02.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3gg6TtX> - The percentage of North Korean citizens who are exposed to the Bible is steadily increasing every year despite extreme persecution, according to a new report that investigates and analyzes the conditions of religious freedom in the Hermit Kingdom.

The annual [White Paper on Religious Freedom](#) in North Korea from The Database Center for North Korean Human Rights found that the number of North Koreans who responded that "they have an experience of seeing the Bible" increased by 4% each year since 2000.

Before 2000, only 16 people claimed to have seen a Bible. After 2000, up to 559 North Korean defectors said they had "seen a Bible," even though religious literature is banned in the isolated country.

Despite limited data, NKDB began its survey on religious persecution in 2007. For this year's survey, the group collected information from 1,234 people and 1,411 cases of religious persecution.

The latest report found that the number of respondents who testified on the ban of religious activities remained the same between 2007 and 2020.

When asked about the level of punishment for religious activities in the country, 46.7% of the respondents answered they have to go to prison camps. About 38.6% of respondents said that they did not know about punishments since they knew nothing about religion.

According to the Center, religious persecution has increased after leader Kim Jong Un issued an order in April 2014 to "arrest people who had contacts with Christianity."

Since then, security forces have actively searched for religious adherents — even in inner China. Employees of the National Security Department, Reconnaissance General Bureau, and the Embassy in China are mobilized to arrest people who have contacted Christianity, the report says.

The report also shared testimonies of several North Korean defectors.

One defector who lives in South Korea recounted the story of an unidentified acquaintance who was killed for her Christian faith.

"When we were living [in North Korea], we did not know she was practicing religion. However, when I came back home, I heard she was killed," the defector recounted.

"When I asked why she died, I was told she was arrested alone whereas the whole family left the town as they were practicing religion. I heard she was suffering and prayed until the point she died. She believed in Christianity. I heard she believed in God. She was

investigated in the provincial political security department, and I heard they hit her until she shed excrement. I heard they dried her out to death as not giving her a drop of water. I heard she died after suffering like a dog."

The NKDB report corroborates previous accounts of the religious freedom restrictions in North Korea, which is ranked as the worst persecutor of Christians in the world on Open Door USA's [World Watch List](#).

A recent report from the London-based Korea Future Initiative identified more than 200 Christians [punished for crimes](#), including religious practice, religious activities in China, possessing religious items, contact with religious persons, attending a place of worship, and sharing religious beliefs.

In several cases, prisoners found with a Bible or religious pamphlets were executed by a firing squad, while others were locked in electrified cages and fed watery soup. Others were executed for smuggling Bible pages into the country from China for North Koreans to make prayer books.

In one instance, a victim found in possession of a Bible was publicly executed in front of over 1,000 people. The victim was tied to a wooden stake and executed by an MPS firing squad.

One witness told KFI, "I saw the flesh fall off. That is how close I was." Another man, who had converted to Christianity, was allegedly forced into a metal cage that was just 3 feet high and 4 feet wide.

"There were steel bars on all four-sides that were heated with electricity," he told KFI. "Usually prisoners lasted only three or four hours in the cage, but I sat there for 12 hours and prayed. I kept praying to God to save me."

The man eventually soiled himself and passed out before being beaten by guards, leaving him with severe injuries.

Pastor Eric Foley of Voice of the Martyrs Korea, who is [awaiting charges](#) for launching Bible balloons into North Korea, said that despite the crackdown on religion, "God is finding ways to get Bibles into North Korea."

"We're amazed at the avenues He's opening," he said. "Please pray that continues. Pray that God is glorified."

North Korean defector fled her country to worship God freely

International Christian Concern (20.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/37aZJCO> - When she was 17 years old, the North Korean Christian Sookyung Kang fled from her repressive country because she wanted to be able to worship God with freedom.

She shared her 3,000 mile journey to South Korea with Liberty in North Korea (LiNK) in a video interview, according to Christian Post.

Kang was born in North Korea's Ryanggang province, situated in the country's central northern area. Since the province borders China, smuggling and defection to China take place regularly. This shows the desperation there is to survive.

"The constant battle with starvation is the North Korean government's way to make sure people don't ever think about being free," she said. "By not satisfying the basic needs of food, sleep and safety, the system forces you to only focus on getting these needs met," she added.

Yet she chose freedom. She wanted to be able to dream. She wanted to live the life She chose. Yet she did not want to abandon her family. The two competing thoughts fought in her mind. In the end, she went for her dreams and freedom.

Seeing what her uncle— a Christian missionary in North Korea—went through, it had an impact on her. The police caught him sharing the Gospel and put him in jail. Before his arrest, she said she was sheltered from the realities of North Korean life.

"He put his life on the line and lived each day as if it was his last," she shared. "As I started visiting my uncle in prison to bring him food, I started seeing North Korea as it really is."

Christianity is seen as an enemy of the state in North Korea. Once arrested, Christians face imprisonment, torture, or even execution. North Korea has retained its unbroken record as the country ranked the most dangerous place to be a Christian by watchdog Open Doors.

In 2011, Kang bid farewell to her homeland. She crossed the border into China and met with workers from LiNK, who escorted her out to shield her from police and human traffickers. After a long journey through various countries, Kang finally arrived in South Korea.

"Being able to worship and praise however I wanted in South Korea, I was so thankful for this freedom. My heart was full of gratitude," she said. "I don't think I came to South Korea without a purpose."

Kang plans to attend graduate school in the United States so that when North Korea opens to the world, she can help rebuild her nation.

"I'm getting ready for it," she said. "That is my vision. Freedom is expressing your faith."
